

# Volunteers begin DNREC's 2016 Hawk Watch at Ashland Nature Center, Cape Henlopen State Park

**DOVER** – As the summer season slowly fades and an autumn chill returns to Delaware, thousands of migrating raptors will travel south over the state on their way to a warmer overwintering climate. Each fall, raptor enthusiasts flock to the First State's two established raptor migration monitoring sites, or hawk watches, to observe and count these hawks, falcons, eagles, ospreys and vultures as they pass by.

This year's Hawk Watches – sponsored by the Delaware Division of Fish & Wildlife, in partnership with the Delmarva Ornithological Society, Delaware Nature Society and Delaware Division of Parks & Recreation – have begun at Delaware Nature Society's Ashland Nature Center near Hockessin and at Cape Henlopen State Park near Lewes. Hawk watchers will spend nearly every day through Wednesday, Nov. 30 at these two sites watching for, identifying and counting raptors.

"The annual marvel of migrating raptors represents nature at its finest, and the Hawk Watch is a great opportunity to enjoy an outdoor experience while contributing scientific information about these magnificent birds," said David Saveikis, director of the Division of Fish & Wildlife. "Volunteers will find the Hawk Watch a challenging and rewarding experience."

Since 2010, 18 species of raptors have been tallied between the two stations, including uncommon migrants like northern goshawks, Swainson's hawks and golden eagles. Daily sightings of red-tailed hawks, bald eagles, sharp-shinned hawks and

American kestrels can be expected. Experienced counters staff both stations, and are supported by dozens of dedicated and skilled volunteers.

“High concentrations of raptors migrate through Delaware in the fall, so watching for these birds this time of year can be very rewarding,” said Wildlife Biologist Kate Fleming, Division of Fish & Wildlife Species Research and Conservation Program. “With Cape Henlopen situated along Delaware’s Atlantic coast, and Ashland Nature Center located in Delaware’s Piedmont region, a visit to the two Hawk Watches provides two very distinct viewing opportunities. At Cape Henlopen, osprey and sharp-shinned hawks crossing Delaware Bay often dominate the scene, and at Ashland, there are times of year that broad-winged hawks come through in the thousands.”

In addition to identifying and counting migrating raptors, the hawk watchers collect other data to better understand the timing, movement and behavior of these birds as they pass over Delaware. They make daily recordings of weather conditions, peak flight periods and flight height of the birds.

“The migration period is especially risky for raptors. The data collected through the Hawk Watches allows us to understand factors important to or impacting raptor migration in Delaware that in turn allows us to develop conservation actions to best protect these species in Delaware and throughout the region,” Fleming said.

The annual Hawk Watches also offer unique experiences for volunteers as well as members of the public who visit the two sites, noted Sally O’Byrne, Delmarva Ornithological Society Hawk Watch Committee chair. “Both birders and non-birders are welcome and can help look for the birds – the sky is very big and birds can come from several directions. Many birders in the state have sharpened their hawk-watching skills by helping out, and everyone has learned how important Delaware is as a migratory pathway for these raptors as they move south,”

O'Byrne added.

Both the Ashland Nature Center Hawk Watch and the Cape Henlopen Hawk Watch are open to the public seven days a week, from 9 a.m. through 3 p.m., depending on weather conditions. The best viewing times are mid-mornings, beginning in late September. The public is invited to visit both stations and learn more about raptor migration or to volunteer to spot and identify the birds. For Cape Henlopen State Park, park entrance fees apply.

To volunteer, contact Derek Stoner, Ashland Hawk Watch, at 302-239-2334, ext. 106, or Sue Gruver, Cape Henlopen Hawk Watch, at 302-645-6390.

For more information about the 2016 Hawk Watch, please contact Kate Fleming at 302-735-8658.

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Vol. 46, No. 339